



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**  
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## **Title 17 Sentencing Provision Review Task Force holds public hearings to receive feedback concerning proposed changes to sentencing penalties**

FORT DEFIANCE, Ariz. – As part of a week-long schedule of public hearings, the Title 17 Sentencing Provision Review Task Force held a public hearing on Wednesday at the Fort Defiance chapter house to receive input from the public and provide clarification on proposed changes to Navajo Nation sentencing penalties.

Earlier in the week, the task force had held public hearings in Tuba City and Chinle.

The task force was formed after Legislation No. 0236-12, sponsored by Council Delegate Alton Joe Shepherd (Jeddito, Cornfields, Ganado, Kin Dah Lichíí, Steamboat), was approved by the Law and Order Committee last July.

Members of the task force are responsible for reviewing provisions under Title 17 of the Navajo Nation Code which outlines sentencing penalties for crimes committed on the Navajo Nation.

In 2000, the Navajo Nation Council eliminated jail terms and fines for a number of offenses, according to LOC members – in part because the Nation had limited resources to prosecute and jail criminal offenders.

Members of the task force include Office of the Public Defender director Kathleen Bowman, Navajo Nation chief prosecutor Bernadine Martin, Navajo Nation Department of Corrections director Delores Greyeyes, acting Navajo Nation chief of police Capt. Ivan Tsosie, Aneth Judicial District staff attorney Glen Renner, information management supervisor Orlando Bowman with the Navajo Nation Division of Public Safety, and Navajo Nation Ethics and Rules Office executive director Vernon Roanhorse.

Also in attendance was LOC member Council Delegate Russell Begaye (Shiprock) who encouraged the public to participate by attending the remaining public hearings, providing feedback electronically whenever it is available, and taking part in an upcoming radio call-in public forum.

“This is your opportunity, your chance to have input on this important topic and recommend changes to our laws,” Delegate Begaye said.

Task force member Kathleen Bowman said the task force conducted bi-weekly meetings since January to review penalties and propose changes.

One member of the audience drew from his personal experience of when he was convicted of a state charge. He pointed out that had he faced the same charge on the Navajo Nation, he would potentially face significantly less jail time and fines – even with the proposed changes.

In response, Bowman explained that the Nation's sentencing penalties are limited by the Indian Civil Rights Act of 1968, which states that tribes within the U.S. cannot impose a jail sentence of more than 365 days or impose a fine of more than \$5,000.

Another member of the audience, a law enforcement officer, questioned why some proposed sentences are not stricter —specifically, for disorderly conduct.

Under proposed changes, those convicted of disorderly conduct could be sentenced to 40 hours of community service for a first offense and 80 hours of community service for a second offense.

Task force member Delores Greyeyes concluded the discussion, explaining that the Nation needs additional funding not only to provide more training for emergency first responders, but also to address the lack of services for people with mental health issues.

Task force members ensured the public that their comments and recommendations will be reviewed by the task force and the LOC, who will then draft legislation that will be considered by the Navajo Nation Council.

Task force members also encouraged the public to review a complete listing of offenses and proposed changes that will soon be made available on the Navajo Nation Council website.

A radio call-in public forum designed to gain more feedback from the public is scheduled to take place live on KTNN on May 30.

Additional public hearings are scheduled to take place at the Crownpoint chapter house on May 16 and at the Shiprock chapter house on May 17. The public hearings will begin at 10 a.m. each day.

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